

Lucille

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Summary: After running away, Carol meets a young woman in the woods who claims to be Daryl Dixon's daughter. The fact that she's also Negan's wife is the least of their problems.

1. Chapter 1

Lucille

Carol was a few miles out from The Kingdom when she heard rustling in the trees.

"I'm armed!" she hissed, readying the pistol she'd stolen on the way out of Alexandria. After everything that had happened, Olivia was still useless at keeping the armory safe.

She hadn't left because of the war, it was just coincidence that her crisis of faith had come at such an inopportune moment. She hadn't told Daryl -- she hadn't told anyone, and if Morgan hadn't come after her, she wouldn't know that anybody had received her note. She'd left it by accident, intending to take it with her instead of leaving it at the kitchen table where she'd written it. She was going to tear it apart, but then she heard stirring from Tobin upstairs, and she bolted before he could see her packed bag.

Morgan had become a better tracker than she expected, and he saved her a few times before they reached The Kingdom together. They offered her a place amongst them, and for a while she considered taking it, until she realized that they were trading with the Saviors the same way the Hilltop did. It wasn't going to be safe for long. So she left. Again.

Morgan came into the clear, his hands held at face level, one carrying his staff.

Carol rolled her eyes. "Still following me?"

"Are you coming back?"

"To Alexandria?"

"The school." He meant The Kingdom, except that he'd refused to call it that.

"No."

"To Alexandria, then?"

"No," she maintained.

He frowned. "Then where are you going?"

"Not sure yet." She finally lowered her gun. "But I'm going alone."

"We have to go back to Rick."

"Then go. Tell him I'm fine."

"They'll need you. Ezekiel told us, Negan's on his way there."

Ezekiel was the leader of The Kingdom. He'd made it quite clear that Alexandria wouldn't be safe for long.

"More reason to leave."

"You don't mean that."

Carol shrugged. "I need you to leave, Morgan. Go. Protect them. I can't."

"You don't need to kill. You just need to be there."

"I'm not like you. I can't fight like you."

"I'll teach you."

"In one night?"

Morgan sighed. "I promised Rick I'd bring you home."

"You failed. That's not on me."

"You're right." She took little pride in the win. "I get it."

"Get what?"

"You can't be there right now. But they still need you."

"I hope you're wrong."

"Me too."

He didn't say goodbye before leaving, and once he was out of sight she wasn't confident he would stay gone. Morgan had a tendency to check up on her when she least wanted it. It was his way of feeling

useful, or apologizing for the Wolf, or stepping in for all of the family that should have been more concerned.

In many ways, she was glad it was Morgan who had followed her. The rest had respected her letter, her wishes.

Not to mention: she didn't have to be kind to him.

Carol kept moving until the sun had fully set, and she was disappointed that she hadn't come across a car or cabin that she could spend the night in. She wished that she had stolen one from Ezekiel, and for a second she wished that Morgan had stuck around long enough to keep watch so she could sleep.

It was too dark to keep moving, so she sat down against a strong tree. The night was cold, and when the tears started, she realized that she hadn't had a chance to cry yet.

She knew she was doing the right thing by leaving — she was useless to the group if she couldn't step up against Negan. They were better off without her, even under the circumstances. Still, part of her wished that she was more like Paula. More ruthless, and more willing to compromise herself to save her family. That could have been her. Maybe it should have been—

The rustling started again.

"You really can't help yourself, can you?"

Silence.

"Morgan?"

More rustling. It was coming from above her.

Carol shot up, drawing out her pistol so gracefully she nearly forgot that she wasn't killing anymore. She moved a few steps out from the tree and aimed upwards.

"Don't shoot. They'll hear it." Walkers.

"Come down. Now."

"Don't shoot me."

I won't, _Carol promised herself.

It was a woman — barely a woman — and she was cleaner than anyone Carol had seen outside of Alexandria in a long time. Red hair and a warm jacket, she almost mistook her for Paula.

Except Paula was dead. Her fault.

The woman climbed down with ease, proving her youth. When she reached the ground, she reached into her pocket and very slowly drew out a trench knife that reminded Carol of her own. She let it drop to the ground and held her palms out in front of her.

"I'm not going to hurt you," the young woman told her.

Carol scoffed. "I'm the one with the gun."

"And I'm the one who's been watching you since the slaughterhouse."

She had felt it, but she'd assumed it was just Morgan tracking her for the past week. Every day, on Tobin's porch, she'd known that something was off in Alexandria, and it had followed her out of it when she'd left. Carol kept her gun steady.

"Why?"

The woman said nothing. She looked afraid.

"Why!?" Carol demanded again, this time pointing her weapon more aggressively.

The woman's eyes welled up with tears. "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"He told me to look out for you, to find out more. You killed Paula and 'Chelle... and Molly!"

"I didn't kill Molly."

"Okay." The tears started falling now, reminding Carol that she hadn't yet wiped her own away. The woman continued: "I was going to bring you back with me, but then I saw you. With him."

"Who are you?" Carol demanded, waving her gun ferociously. The woman flinched.

"I couldn't do it! I know you won't go, but I need you to!"

"-What are you talking about!?"

"He's in trouble! Negan's going after him and you can help. I need you to help me."

Carol's brow furrowed. "What do you know about Negan?"

"I'm his wife."

A week earlier, Carol would have fired.

"Negan sent you after me?"

The redhead nodded. "He likes you."

"He doesn't know me."

"We were listening. He knows you killed them. He thinks you're strong, and he knows you're not with them. Not really."

Carol didn't argue. "You told him that?"

"I tell him everything. He trusts me."

Carol couldn't help her curiosity. "Do you trust him?"

The woman lowered her hands slightly as she shook her head. Then she stopped. She paused.

"Are you still with him?" Carol asked.

The woman shrugged. "Maybe. As far as he knows."

"That doesn't make any sense!"

"I can't explain it like this!" The woman shrieked, then flinched as Carol came closer to her. Her hands shot up again, well above eye level.

"Try!" Carol demanded, wishing she had the strength to shoot.

The woman took a deep breath. She started: "I was watching, at that place, and he was digging a grave. You were with him. He trusts you."

"Daryl?" Carol remembered Denise's death, and her last moments with him.

"Daryl Dixon, right? He doesn't know me," the woman admitted, "Not really. Not for years."

Carol almost lowered the gun.

"What do you know about him?"

"He likes you. He trusts you, and he needs you. I saw him go out after Dwight. They're back at that place now." She was crying again. "Negan's going to kill him, but he can't. You can't let him do that!"

Carol didn't move, but her mind was racing. The redhead was shaking in fear, and she couldn't be trusted, but Daryl was in danger.

Her arms were getting tired. She needed answers.

"How do you know Daryl?"

The woman shook her head. "I don't know what he's told you. How long have you known him?"

"Long enough."

"Maybe not. He was just a kid, I don't even know if heâ€¢ll he might not want to..." Her accent made her difficult to understand through her tears. It was southern, upper class. Carol hadn't heard one like that in a long time. The woman composed herself a little. "The fact is, Dwight's got Negan convinced that he needs to die. I can stop it, but only if you come back with me. We can save him."

"You want to trade me for him?"

"It's not like that."

"That's what it sounds like."

"You care about him, don't you?"

"Not enough to die for him." It was lie, and from the look on the woman's face, they both knew it.

"Negan doesn't want to kill you. He just wants to talk. If you come back with me, I can convince him to let Daryl go. He'll listen to me, so long as I earn it. He owes me a favour."

Carol sighed. She lowered her gun, backing up a couple of paces. "How old are you?" She asked.

"Twenty-four. Maybe twenty-five, I don't know. What day is it?"

"I'm not sure."

"Will you come with me?"

Carol stirred, completely baffled by the situation. Dwight had captured Daryl, and Negan wanted him dead. Unless she turned herself in.

It was a tempting offer, a way to make up for her kill list. Then again, nothing could erase the horrible things she'd done. There was no sacrifice big enough to make up for that.

Then again, if he just wanted to talkâ€!

"Why should I trust you?" she asked, raising her gun again. The redhead hadn't moved.

"I don't want Daryl to die."

"Why not?

"He's someone to me."

"And you to him?"

"I'm his daughter."

It came out of nowhere, and Carol didn't believe it for a second. "He doesn't have children." The malice she heard in her own voice startled her, and it horrified the redhead.

"No, he doesn't," the woman agreed, "But he's my father nonetheless."

In many ways, it all added up: the way Daryl had searched for Sophia, and how devastated he'd been when she was found. He was certainly old enough to have a daughter this girl- woman's age, at least if he was as young as she claimed he was when she was born.

It explained Beth.

The redhead didn't know how to shut up: "He doesn't know me, and he hasn't seen me since I was a little kid," she explained, "But I swear to God that I wouldn't do anything to hurt him."

"You say he's going to die if I don't meet Negan?"

The woman nodded. "I don't want to go back, I don't! I'm was only with him to stay alive, and when he sent me out to find you, I thought I'd leave. I thought I'd finally get out. Then I saw him at that place, and with Dwight, and everything happened so fast!"

Carol lowered her gun as the woman started sobbing uncontrollably, her palms still held pitifully in front of her face. On her left wrist, there was a triangle-shaped birthmark.

Just like his.

"What's your name?" Carol demanded.

The redhead didn't look at her. She whimpered: "Lucille."

2. Chapter 2

It took a long time to trust the young woman, but Carol figured it was safer to try. After all, she had maintained that Carol's family was in danger, and that was something the older woman couldn't run away from, just in case.

Lucille took Carol back to Alexandria. The trip was long, and lasted until the next day. She had explained to Carol that Negan was on the way to Alexandria, and that he had become almost obsessed with the idea of having her join his side. He liked Carol, or at least what he knew about her. She didn't know how to take it.

On the way, the two women spoke.

"How well do you know him?" Carol asked, watching as the Lucille moved effortlessly through the brush. In many ways, her physicality reminded Carol of Daryl, and she was surprised at how well she navigated the woods.

"Hardly at all. I was thirteen the last time we spoke."

"Will he recognize you?"

"I look like my mother. He might."

Lucille was exceptionally matter-of-fact under the circumstances. After all, they were on their way to a rescue mission.

Carol had so many questions that she wanted to ask, but she decided to stick to the ones that mattered to the group.

"What does Negan want with Alexandria?"

"Your group is strong. Self-sufficient. He needs more people working for him, and he knows that you can help with that."

"He wants them to work for him?" Carol refused to refer to herself in relation to the rest of the town.

"He's smart like that."

Carol frowned. It was quiet that afternoon, and they'd hardly come across any Walkers. The girl was clever in evading them, and better at putting them down. She hardly got her hands dirty whenever she had to do it.

"Why do you think Daryl's in trouble?"

Lucille shrugged. "He and Dwight are after each other."

"Dwight works for Negan?" She already knew the answer, but it was good to confirm. Who knew how many groups were out there nowadays.

"Dwight is strong, and Negan sees that. They used to trust each other."

"Used to?"

Lucille took a long time to answer. It wasn't until Carol prodded that she did: "Dwight was my fiancÃ©."

"What?"

"We were engaged. Before any of this, we were going to get married."

Carol was enraged. If this young woman was really the daughter of her best friend, then she was tainted by her choice in company, and she was no longer part of his family. Still, she claimed to be of help, and Carol knew that she wanted to return Lucille to who she claimed was her father. If it was true, Daryl would appreciate it.

After all, it wasn't like she could kill her.

Lucille kept talking: "He shot Daryl."

Carol all but gasped. "How do you know that?"

"I saw it. I wasn't _there, _but I saw it go down. Then they left for your community."

"It's not mine."

"Of course it is."

"No, it isn't," Carol admitted. "I left. For good."

"Then why are you with me?" Lucille asked, but Carol knew she was already well aware of the answer. She changed the subject:

"Why are you with Negan if you're meant to be with Dwight?"

Lucille shrugged. "Dwight was good, before all of this. He was kind. Then he wasn't."

Carol nodded. In a way, she understood. "So you moved on to someone worse?"

"Negan isn't a bad person."

"He's a maniac!" Carol was shocked at the girl's response.

Again, Lucille dismissed her disgust. "He's been good to me."

"Then why are we trying to stop him?"

"It's not that often you find your father at the end of the world."

And Carol had to ask: "And if Daryl dies? What will you do then?"

Lucille gave a sad, half-smile. "I was sent out to bring you to Negan. Either I get you there and we save him, or I get you there and we don't."

So it was a win either way. For Negan, at least.

3. Chapter 3

They reached Alexandria in the evening. They surveyed from afar before approaching. The walls were poorly guarded, but Carol could see several men she didn't recognize pacing outside.

"Dammit," she heard Lucille drawl.

"Some of yours?"

The redhead didn't comment on her association with the Saviors. "Mick's there. He's never liked me."

"Will he let us in?"

"I'll have to tie you up. Otherwise he'll think we're working together."

"Why not just tell him the truth?" Lucille raised an eyebrow. "You asked me to come see Negan, and I agreed. Simple as that."

Lucille shook her head. "Too easy."

Inside the walls, Carol heard Rick yelling. There were no gunshots, but the pain in his voice was devastating.

"We haven't got much time. Come on."

Carol hesitated, but held out her hands once Lucille taken off her belt. She tied it artfully around Carol's wrists.

"Sorry," she whispered.

Carol scoffed. "If this goes South, you will be."

Lucille frowned. "I know you don't trust me, but we're on the same side."

"I don't even know which side you're on."

"No one's. Like you said, you ain't either." She couldn't disagree.

"But we both want to save Daryl, right?"

Carol nodded. She wanted to save everyone, if she could.

They women approached the wall. The man Carol assumed was Mick greeted them.

"I didn't think you were coming back," he told Lucille accusingly.

"What made you think that?" This wasn't the girl Carol had met in the woods. This Lucille was sharp, confident, and void of fear.

"Been a few days at least." He had terrible breath. Carol tried not to flinch when he spoke.

"She's a troublesome woman to find. Not hard to hold onto, though. I think she'll make a good addition, don't you?"

Mick eyed Carol up and down as though she were a hot meal. She didn't let herself feel any of it. She just had to wait this out until they got to Negan inside.

Mick licked his lips. "I thought she was here to get some just-desserts for what happened to your sister-wives?"

"That's not funny." Lucille was cold now, and Carol could tell she was upset by the memory. So that's how she knew the women who had captured her and Maggie. They were all 'married' to Negan. Lucille brushed him off: "Has he done it yet?"

"No, still choosing one," Mick answered. "But Dwight's set on the bowman."

"I saw."

"'Course you did." The grimy Savior was taking a long time to decide whether or not to let the two women into Alexandria. Carol didn't know how to help, so she stayed quiet. Finally, he nodded. "They're by the lake. Strikes me _she_ _can_ find it?" He gestured towards Carol.

Lucille didn't say a word, but she nodded, and the gate was opened.

As soon as they were alone, Carol whispered: "You're not his only wife?"

Lucille remained cold. "I am now."

"What does he want with me?"

The girl didn't answer, but she did pause, and turned to Carol. She looked at her wrists. "I'm going to take this off. Will you take me to the lake?"

Carol thought about lake. The burning lake, with the burning Walkers. She remembered that night with Morgan, and Denise, and the Wolf. Nothing good ever happened there.

She nodded.

Lucille undid the binding and replaced it around her hips, missing a few belt loops. She mumbled as she spoke: "Let me do the talking. I have an idea, and if it works and we can make the trade, I think I can save all of your friends. But you're gonna have to come back to the compound with us. Can you do that?"

Carol wanted to know so much more of what was expected from her, but there wasn't any more time to talk it through. Lucille was perplexing, but she was sincere, and she had promised Carol's safety. She sighed. "We're doing this to save your father."

The young redhead nodded. "Lead the way."

4. Chapter 4

Daryl Dixon was going to die.

He'd been sure of it all day, and Negan's shit-eating grin certainly wasn't going to change his mind.

The group was defeated, kneeling down in front of a man that Daryl could only describe as evil personified. Negan was clean, sure, but his hands definitely weren't.

This was it. His last day on Earth.

They'd intercepted the RV by pure luck — luck for Dwight, of course, who was acting like he'd just won the lottery. He had said a few things to the other Saviors that indicated he might not be on the best of terms with Negan. The RV was a chance to show off.

They'd ridden back to Alexandria with Eugene in tow. The five of them were already lined up by the time Rick and the group were dragged out of their homes and placed with them by the edge of the lake. Only fighters had been forced in line, the Alexandrians held behind a wall of Saviors to stop them from attempting anything that might cross Negan. They looked weak now. Useless.

Daryl remembered the fight against the Walkers. The fire. The smell of burning flesh.

He could smell the blood dripping slowly from his shoulder. He glanced at Rick, who was staring back at him with a look of defeat that took him by surprise.

His eyes drifted down the line. Maggie, Aaron, Carl, Abraham, Eugene, Sashaâ€¦

She ain't here.

There was a joy in the revelation. Carol was safe. Maybe she'd left Alexandria looking for him?

No. She'd know to leave him well enough alone. Especially now. The spark they used to share was dimmer now, and Carol didn't care for him the way he used to know she did.

It wasn't that the love had gone away, or even the trust. It was just that sense they belonged to one another, whatever that had meant before. She had chosen someone else to open up to, and that was okay, despite how little Daryl understood of why.

She wasn't coming. This wasn't Terminus, and she couldn't save them.

Daryl hadn't realized he was shaking, and whether it had come from the gunshot, or the leather-clad man exiting the RV, he knew it was unacceptable. He had to play brave. He couldn't let Negan or Dwight win. That wasn't in him.

And then the nursery rhymes started.

Somehow Daryl found it in himself to be defiant, and when the wire-wound baseball bat in Negan's hands found itself pointed in his direction, he straightened his shoulders and faced it like the man he'd always hoped he'd be. This was it, and that was okay.

Negan was uncapable of shutting up. The bat rose-

"STOP NOW!"

Frozen was the best way to describe the scene. Negan froze. The Saviors froze. Daryl froze.

This might be our chance.

It wasn't Rick who had yelled. Negan turned his head. Daryl looked around at the dozens of armed Saviors. Even with his back turned, Negan was still very much winning.

There was a mumbling amongst the Saviors as a young woman pushed through them. Daryl could barely see her in the darkness, but he noticed Negan's shoulders softening, and the baseball bat fell to his side. The woman spoke from the crowd:

"You said I get a favour. One-for-one, that's what you said." Her accent was thick. Not from around here...

Negan replied in a new tone, a softer one: "That was in exchange for something special. What's in it for me?"

"I've got her."

Negan looked back at the execution line. He cleared his throat. "You just give me one minute, all right gang?" He turned to the woman.

A few of the Saviors shifted, allowing the light from Alexandria to light the woman dimly, and Daryl could see she had red hair. She spoke to the Saviors in a low voice, and they parted, creating a small runway between them.

Daryl didn't need any more light to know it was Carol entering the clearing. His shoulder ached, but nothing was worse than her being there.

"Noâ€|" he heard himself drawl.

"Why isn't she tied up?" Negan called to his friend, and she came a step closer.

"She wanted to come. I told her you'd pick him. I was right."

"How's it a favour if you didn't have to work for it?"

A few steps closer, and Daryl could almost see the redhead's face, but Negan was in the way.

"Just give me this one, all right?" she begged in a soft voice, and Negan's frame overtook hers when he pulled her into a shockingly tender kiss. Near them, Daryl could see Dwight wiping his mouth jealously, but that didn't make him feel any better.

Daryl let himself watch Carol, whose face he couldn't make out with the backlighting from town. He wondered if she was looking back at him, and as he wondered what kind of deal she'd made with the Savior, his heartrate started to rise.

What was she doing, and why was she helping him?

In front of him, Negan was working out the terms with his girlfriend.

"She knows what I want?"

Daryl heard the redhead's voice behind Negan. "She has an idea."

"You like her?"

"Sure."

Negan waved at a burly fraction of Saviors. "Tie her up, but be nice about it. In case she wants to try anything." His chin lowered, and he was talking to the redhead again. "Why him?"

There was a pause. "He's someone to me."

Daryl knew they were talking about him. He turned his head to Rick, who could see the girl, but still looked as confused as he felt. How did she know him, and if she did, then why was she helping him? Her voice was young, but firm. She reminded him of someone.

Maybe Carol, who was being held firmly by the Saviors in the background, had caught her. Maybe Carol was the one to force her back to Alexandria, and the two had teamed up to trick Negan. Maybe it was all part of some master plan.

Daryl wished he could see Carol's face. He'd know if he could just take a look into her eyes. He'd be able to tell if she was planning to do something amazing, as she so often did.

Nothing happened.

Negan turned back to the group, still blocking the redhead. He was considering her offer.

"That woman back there is one of yours," he told Rick, as if he

didn't already know. "I know what she did to my people, and I want her to come back home with me. We have some chatting to do."

Daryl heard Rick gulping, as though he was stopping himself from saying anything. _Good, _Daryl thought, _Don't mess this up any more than you have to._

Negan stroked his beard cartoonishly. More silence. More chills.

He shook his head.

"No, it's not enough."

_ "Negan!" _ the young woman screamed behind him.

He seemed amused. "It's just too easy, sweetheart. You'll have to do a lot more than give directions to claim one of our victims."

Suddenly Negan was holding his bat up again, and Daryl could hear the redhead whimpering behind him. He turned around and offered it to her.

"Noâ€|" Daryl could hear her crying. He almost felt bad for her. _Almost. _

Too far away, he could see Carol wavering. She looked helpless, even in the dark. _It's okay._

"I'm not saying you have to kill this guy," Negan explained, "I'm not gonna make you do something like that." She was still moaning:

"Please! You promised!"

"You get to pick a replacement! See? That's a good trade-off, isn't it? One-for-one, like I said. Seems more than reasonable."

The world froze again as the woman was making her decision. Finally, Negan forced the bat into her hand.

He placed his hands on her so gently, just enough to move her into place in front of the group. She hung her head low, covering her face. She made no sound, and she wasn't crying. She was terrified.

Negan loved to talk. "I'd like to introduce all of you to one of my deadliest weapons," he announced. Some of the Saviors laughed, but not at the woman's expense. "A girl who has given me more pleasure in this world than I deserve, and a strong soul to boot."

It was strange, and the entire group felt it. Negan genuinely liked this woman.

"Now it's time for her to choose who takes responsibility for the murder of my men."

_ "Stop!" _Daryl heard Carol calling from across the clearing. Negan didn't flinch. It was as if he'd barely heard her.

He was grinning.

"Go ahead and make your pick," he sanctioned the woman kindly, Carol still howling in the distance.

"Fine."

In all the commotion, Daryl hadn't even noticed that the young woman had lifted her head.

_No. -

"Time to have some fun," Negan sang.

Please.

"Any day now, Lucille."

Not you.

5. Chapter 5

Carol didn't have a clue what she was saying, she only knew she couldn't possibly say it loud enough.

She was being held firmly by a bald Savior, who seemed very careful not to touch her in any way that might come across as inappropriate. In a way, he was almost respectful, at least when it came to holding her back from her friends.

There was no way she could help them. Lucille was standing in front of Negan now, holding his baseball bat as though it weighed a hundred pounds. Its tip dragged against the ground as she scanned the line-up, considering every course of action.

Negan's voice was loud. "We don't have all night. Choose one, or choose all of 'em!"

Carol could tell that Lucille was shaking, and she would have felt bad for her if she wasn't his wife. But Carol didn't care about Lucille. She wasn't even watching her.

She was watching Daryl.

Daryl Dixon, who looked like his entire world had come crashing down around him. Daryl, who had been ready to die. Who had been ready for all of it to end.

Just like she had. Before.

Before this night.

Lucille lifted the baseball bat slightly. She was standing directly in front of Daryl, and it seemed like they were making eye contact. Maybe Lucille was speaking, but it was impossible to tell from so far away. Negan, on the other hand:

"Fine, if you can't choose, I will."

Maybe it was just because Glenn was _right there, _but of course Negan reached out and grabbed him by the collar of his shirt, dragging him into place between Daryl and Lucille.

Lucille's shoulders softened.

Carol stopped breathing.

Lucille raised the bat a little bit higher off the ground, but it was still heavy. She wasn't ready to do it just yet.

Carol would have screamed again, but there no words.

The bat rose-

Daryl had words.

"No, _no, _just take me, please!"

He was louder than Negan, and louder than Carol. He crawled forward a bit, trying to place himself back in Lucille's line of impact.

"It doesn't have to be like this, just take me! It's okay, just pick me. I don't care._ Just take me!_"

Lucille was shaking again, this time far more visibly. Carol couldn't see her face, but she knew the young woman was horrified. If Daryl was her father, then the idea of murdering him would ruin her.

Daryl, on the other hand, looked so defiant in his offering. So brave.

He wasn't defeated, Carol realized, he was heroic.

Always, heroic.

"Just take me. Please, Lucy."

It all came flushing back to Carol. Every beautiful memory, from the Cherokee Rose he so often sought out for her, to the little jokes the two of them shared independent of the rest of the group.

Those moments when his words were so big and so meaningful that they shook her world.

And those moments when his actions were so small and insignificant that they tore that world apart.

Yes, she still belonged to him. That's why she had left, and now it was all for nothing.

Carol could feel the tears welling up, her entire body still willing her to say something that could stop Negan, stop Lucille, and stop the entire awful sight. The bald Savior held her tighter.

Before she found the words, she heard Negan again:

"What did you just say to me?" he demanded, taking a step closer to Lucille.

The redhead swung his baseball bat into the air, aiming directly at Negan's pompous face. He was too quick, and held up his hands to catch the blow. He cried out in pain, having been cut by the barbed wire that dressed the weapon, but still managed to push it away from him.

_ "What the fuck are you playing at?!" _

She tried swinging again, once, and then twice, and then Negan shoved her away. She fell back sideways, mid-swing.

The barbed baseball bat finally struck its victim.

Glenn probably didn't feel a thing before his body went crashing down into the dirt.

Maggie screamed.

Lucille screamed.

Daryl swayed.

And Negan laughed.

6. Chapter 6

Of course, Daryl recognized her immediately.

How old was she the last time they'd spoken? Eleven, twelve? Maybe older or younger, but either way she looked the same. Long red hair, wide blue eyesâ€¢ she looked exactly like her mother did the last time Daryl had seen her.

The last time he'd visited, she still lived in Georgia. He'd gone by with Merle, both on their bikes. She seemed so distant, and so suspicious of him that he was terrified. She was too smart for her own good, and she knew exactly what he was: nothing. Not a father, not a contributing member of society. He was just a drifter, and even though she was so young, she got it.

Merle called her Lucy, and she giggled. They called her that for the rest of the day. It was the one thing that seemed to make her trust him, even if he didn't trust himself.

He'd never wanted a child, and once he had one he didn't know what to do about it.

Caroline â€“ Lucille's mother â€“ had been a classmate of his. A little older, but that didn't matter after he'd dropped out of high school. She came back from college on her Christmas break, they tried to out-drink one another at some farm kid's bonfire, and by that summer she came back again with a baby belly the size of Atlanta.

He'd never thought about sex much before that, and he didn't think about much since. Something that was barely part of his life had managed to screw everything up, and when Caroline told him that he was going to be a father he immediately flaked.

Merle encouraged it. "No point wasting the pocket cash you got on some lousy kid," he'd said.

So Daryl was never really a father. Caroline had the baby, named her Lucille, and asked him to visit every time he took an odd job in town. Asking for money.

At the time, Merle said she was being unreasonable, but of course she wasn't. She just expected more from him. More than he could ever give.

So he gave her the money. Whatever it took, until finally she married a guy in the city and moved out of town.

Despite Merle telling him not to, Daryl still tried to see Lucille every time he got a little cash. When she was old enough, he started giving her the money directly, telling her to buy whatever she wanted. Caroline didn't need it, and by her second divorce she was pretty well set up.

The third husband was the one who took her out of Atlanta. Out of Georgia.

She never called to say where they were going, and Daryl never tried to find out.

After all, the kid was never really his.

And then there was Sophia. She wasn't his either, but she was about the age Lucille would have been on that last day. That's when something inside of him clicked, and he knew that he had to find this one. Suddenly, Sophia was the daughter he'd let get away, and he wasn't about to let it happen again.

He searched for days, and by the time Sophia came out of the barn, she was as much his as she was Carol's. At least, in his heart.

Losing Sophia allowed Daryl to feel the loss of Lucille, and it was only natural that he and Carol would gravitate towards one another after that. They had too much in common. They started to belong to one another, and become the one person that the other could completely trust.

And then Carol was gone, and the prison was lost, and Daryl was with Beth. Beth, who was so young, and clever, and hopeful that he knew she'd never make it. He tried so hard to save her, and to be there for her the way he should have been for his own daughter. He couldn't do it.

Maybe he hoped that Lucille was so brave when she faced death. As brave as Beth had been, when he let her down too.

Except that Lucille wasn't dead. She was very much alive, and very dangerous.

Daryl kneeled in front of her in a pool of his own sweat and blood. He was as much in shock as she looked, having been tasked with the choice of who to murder in a firing line of survivors. She was

sweating too, beads of tears camouflaged in the salty dampness of her face. Her eyes fluctuated between wide open and squinting. She was considering it.

She used to have the same look while she was learning to read. Every time Daryl visited, she'd sit him down and force him to listen to some storybook he'd never heard of. He didn't mind much. It made him feel like a father.

But he'd never felt like less of father now. He felt like a failure. He wanted to beg for her forgiveness, and to tell her he should have been there to protect her from all of this. From Negan.

Negan, who had kissed her in a way that made Daryl want to vomit. How had an intense little girl become the property of this monster? I'll kill you for this-

"Fine, if you can't choose, I will," Negan roared, interrupting Daryl's train of thought.

Glenn was in front of him. Glenn, who'd tried to bring him home to Alexandria when they'd needed him most. Glenn, who had never done a single wrong thing to any of them since the entire end of the world began.

Glenn, who was about to have a baby of his own.

And Lucille was considering killing him.

No way.-

"Just take me, please!" Daryl was suddenly begging. He crawled forward, the blanket on his shoulders dragging him down more than he expected. "It doesn't have to be like this, just take me! It's okay, just pick me. I don't care.Just take me!"

Far away, he could see Carol's frame struggling in the arms of a Savior. She was quiet. She couldn't help him. He'd made up his mind.

Negan cleared his throat impatiently.

Lucille looked horrified. She looked so young, and so afraid that every part of Daryl wished he could take everything away. The entire world gone, just so his daughter didn't have to live in it.

A second later she looked determined. She looked as though she had made up her mind.

They made eye contact, and she had that face he remembered from their last day together. Intense, judgemental. She knew exactly who he was, and exactly what she needed to do.

She looked back at Glenn.

"Just take me. Please, Lucy."

It came out soft, but it echoed so loudly in the silence that no one could have missed it. The Saviors laughed, and Negan scoffed.

Lucille smiled.

She turned her head to the side ever so slightly, talking over her shoulder to where Negan stood arrogantly. She said:

"What would your last words be, _sweetheart?_"

Negan tilted his head. "What did you just say to me?" he questioned her, coming a little too close.

"I'll take it that's your answer."

When Lucille swung the bat at Negan's ugly mug, Daryl understood what it meant to be a proud father.

And when Negan pushed her back into Glenn, he understood what it meant to be a failure.

7. Chapter 7

Glenn was down.

Daryl felt himself leave his own body for a second while the tragedy went down around him.

Lucille had been pushed back by Negan, whose hands were bloodied from their blow with the barbed wire baseball bat. For a moment, he looked as shocked as any of them by her betrayal.

It was an accident that the bat had collided with anyone after that, and no one knew how to respond. The Saviors weren't sure whether to collect Lucille or cheer her on. The group wasn't sure how long they had to wait before they could check on Glenn, who was bleeding from his temple in a way that made Daryl want to vomit.

As soon as Negan laughed, the rest happened in a flash.

He wiped his hands on his jeans, drying them of excess blood. If he was in much pain, he was handling it well. He picked up his baseball bat before dragging Lucille off the ground.

"No, _no, NO!" _she was screaming, trying to get a glimpse of the damage she had done.

Negan hushed as his free hand covered her mouth, and he pulled her away from the scene.

Daryl tried as hard as he could to stand, but every time he tried he fell back down on all fours. He crawled a few feet, but he was slow, and before he knew it Negan had taken Lucille away through the pool of Saviors that had started to disperse in various directions after him. They were looting.

Lifting his head with what was left of his strength, Daryl finally found Carol in the crowd. She was fighting hard, until the Savior that was holding her balled his hand in a fist and knocked her out easily. A second later, she was gone too.

Daryl fell on his side, watching the backlit Saviors steal whatever they wanted out of Alexandria. He couldn't hear anything except for a ringing in his ears he couldn't quite place. He was shaking.

When he couldn't see any more Saviors, he rolled over.

That's when heard her screams.

Maggie was convulsing over Glenn's body while Eugene maneuvered around her, using an old shirt to bandage the bleeding skull. Sasha tried holding Maggie back, and Daryl heard her blathering a few things about the baby.

Daryl was still shaking.

He watched as Rick and Abraham lifted Glenn off the ground and started running him across the opening, back into the city. How much time had passed? Were the Saviors gone?

Daryl had no idea. He was thinking about Carol, and Lucille, and how they had tried to save him. How they would probably be killed for it. How they might already be dead.

His shoulder hurt. Hell, his entire body was on fire.

Yet somehow he was freezing, too.

The ringing was getting louder, and everything was getting brighter. He was on his back now. He saw Rosita trying to tell him something or maybe she was asking something? She looked furious. She'd been crying. She looked up at someone.

Eugene was carrying him.

No, he was carrying his feet.

Sasha was helping him.

"Are they gone yet?"

"You sure it's safe in there?"

"Just open it! _Corre!_"

A flash later, Tobin was helping him. They were inside. The infirmary was dark.

Daryl was shaking. His shoulder didn't hurt anymore.

Rick stared down at him, empty and helpless.

"He's going into shock, _chorra! Maldita sea!_"

He saw Carol, in her grey shirt. The one with the lace on the back that she'd found in an abandoned department store on the road. How long ago had that been?

"Is he breathing?"

"Where's Glenn?"

"Oh my godâ€|"

_ "QuÃ© chingados!" _

"Somebody do something!"

She was looking at him. She was carrying a gun, and holding her trench knife. Behind her, Lucille was holding a baseball bat.

They both looked nervous, like they weren't telling him something.

His shoulder buzzed.

_ "What the fuck are you playing at?" _Lucille interrogated him in Negan's voice. She looked so much like her mother.

_ "You have to let yourself feel it," _Carol begged him.

Somewhere close, Maggie was wailing.

Carol kissed him on the forehead.

Everything hurt.

8. Chapter 8

Carol had woken up that morning with an enormous headache. The room was fuzzy, and there was a humming in her ears that still hadn't quieted. Carol couldn't think straight, so she looked around for anything that might spark her memory of the previous day. Unable to stand, her viewpoint was limited, but she took in what she could.

The bedroom was more like a cabin, or a dorm. She could see four bunk beds, all made of wood, and they all had matching bedding. It was clean. Surprisingly clean.

All of the beds were made, except for one across and down from where Carol had been placed. She had been tucked in tightly, laying on her side. She felt grimy, like she hadn't washed in days at least. She swallowed, suddenly aware of how thirsty she was, but there was a metallic taste in her mouth that she recognized as blood. The ringing kept getting louder, and her temple pounded. She'd hit her head, or someone had hit it for her.

There was a rattling sound. She managed to push herself onto her back, and saw that there was a wobbly fan on the ceiling.

A flash of red.

Carol turned her head to the side a little too quickly, making her squint through what little light was coming in through a window she couldn't see. Lucille was stirring in her own bed, sighing loudly as she slowly awoke. She rolled over, and Carol watched her sit up calmly. Carol could see her back underneath long, straggly hair. She was naked.

Instinctually, Carol's hands made their way onto her body. She was in the same clothes as the night before. The night before, when-

She remembered. She gasped.

Lucille pulled her sheet up swiftly, holding it to her chest as she turned to face Carol.

"You're awake," she drawled, her voice not yet warm.

Carol tried to sit up.

"Careful now, you had a bad blow last night. Don't worry, he's taking care of Jensen for you. It wasn't appropriate, what he did."

Carol realized that Jensen must have been the Savior that knocked her out. She tried to speak:

"We have toâ€œ;" the light amplified in her mind and she shivered. It felt like the worst hangover of her life.

"Hold on," Lucille told her, standing. She wrapped her top sheet around herself, tucking it at her chest like it was a bath towel. She approached Carol's bed calmly and knelt down next to her, pressing her hands under her head and back. Slowly, she helped Carol sit up straight. Carefully, she pushed her legs over the edge and rest her feet on the ground.

The light was blinding again, but Carol knew it was only in her head.

"We have to get out of here," she managed to mumble, the pain in her temple distracting her from coming up with a plan. She made eye contact with Lucille, who was calm.

Too calm.

"You're safe," she told Carol, standing up and returning to her own bed. "Everything's locked up from Walkers, they can't get in here. Even if they could, there's a 24-hour watch. That was my idea." Lucille crouched by her bed and pulled what looked like half of a suitcase from underneath it. She retrieved some sort of dress from it, placing it over her head. Standing, she managed the drop the sheet and pull down the dress in one swift motion, keeping herself covered.

The dress was a light green colour with long sleeves. It hit her just below the knee.

"It's his favourite," Carol heard her explain. She was as clean as the rest of the room.

"You had a bath?" she questioned, still too confused and too dizzy to try escaping.

"A shower. Last night, when we came in. You were out like a light, didn't even stir from all the sound. I cleaned you up the best I could, too, but it was tough to do with you in the bed. I checked your eyes, by the way â€œ you shouldn't be concussed, but I'll do a quick exam before breakfast. Well, maybe it's lunch."

Carol let out a burst of air she didn't realize she'd been holding.
"Breakfast?"

"You hungry?"

"Thirsty," Carol blurted honestly.

Lucille nodded, rushing away from the beds. Carol realized that there were two doors at the foot of the room, and if she'd had more strength, she would have run through it after Lucille. Instead she looked the other way, finding a small window that overlooked the space. It was bright outside, later than morning. Then again, they'd had a long night.

The memories didn't swarm her mind, instead resting peacefully like framed photos on a shelf. Negan's leather jacket. Daryl's bloody shoulder. Lucille holding the baseball bat. Glenn-

There was a glass of water in front of her, and Carol snatched it greedily, chugging forcefully.

"Careful, you don't want to choke on it."

Carol stopped, pacing herself. Immediately, she could see more clearly. Lucille's cheeks were swollen, like she was holding back tears. She handed the glass back to her.

"There's a tap?"

"There's a well."

"Where are we?"

Lucille gave her a small smile before answering. "This is home." Carol opened her mouth to protest, but Lucille continued: "My home, I mean. We call it The Compound. You've been here before."

It was the building the Alexandrians had stormed, Carol realized.

"Do all of them live here?"

Lucille shook her head. "No, it's off-site. I think it must have been some sort of radio broadcast center, but they gutted it. There are little apartments all over. Maybe it was military, I'm not sure. I live here. Paula, Mollyâ€|'Chelleâ€|we lived here together." That explained the extra beds. "Negan's upstairs. He's got a suite."

Carol's vision became sharp at the mention of Negan.

"He's here?"

"I don't know. He hasn't been down. He'll be wanting some food too, I imagine. Molly used to do the bulk of the cooking, but she taught me some things-"

"We have to go."

Again, Lucille smiled. She brushed Carol's arm tenderly. "I have clothes for you. You want something clean?"

Carol was flabbergasted. How was Lucille so content to stay with the threat of Negan looming so closely nearby?

Time passed slowly as she allowed Lucille to help her up and out of the 'bedroom'. Approaching the main door, Carol could see a small kitchen with a rectangular table in the center of it. The other door was hiding between her bunk and the one next to it. It led to a three-piece bathroom.

Carol allowed Lucille to carefully undress her. She wetted a hand towel and gave it to her, leaving the room so that Carol could sponge herself off as best she could. Lucille returned with a soft long sleeved shirt and some slightly oversized pants that hung low on her hips. Some socks. No underwear.

Lucille apologized. "I can request some in the next run," she offered, but Carol was still too bewildered to respond.

Lucille took a small flashlight from the cabinet above them and flashed it uncomfortably in Carol's eyes, asking questions that she assumed were part of some sort of medical examination. She wondered what Lucille had done before the Walkers. Was she qualified enough to tell Carol that she was fine, non-concussed?

Who knew?

Lucille took her hand, and Carol didn't pull away. She was led through the bedroom and into the kitchen, where she took a seat in one of several chairs at the table and watched Lucille search through various cabinets for some food. When Lucille opened the fridge, Carol nearly gasped.

It was filled with fresh goods: eggs, milk, and even some fruits and vegetables. Lucille took what she wanted and began to cook what Carol assumed was some sort of omelette on the stove.

"If it works for a hangover," she practically sang, "It'll do for bad head bump."

There was a door next to the stove that Carol assumed led into the hallway. She didn't bother making a run for it.

Negan wanted her to be his prisoner, and it was slowly becoming clear that he wanted her to be more than that. She was in the place where his wives lived. That's what he wanted. The door was probably locked from the outside.

The plate was in front of her before she could consider the punishments that would no doubt be waiting for them whenever Negan decided to show up. Carol didn't bother starving herself. After all, she'd need her strength if she was going to make it out of there alive.

Lucille looked pale, except for her cheeks, which were still flushed with the threat of tears. Everything else about her was too cool for Carol's comfort.

"What is it?" she found herself demanding, her voice stronger after a few bites of food.

Lucille frowned. "I keep thinking about that man. The Asian.
Was-"

"Glenn," Carol corrected her.

"Glenn," Lucille agreed, her eyes starting to well up. Her shoulders rose to her ears as she tried to contain her tears. "Did you see what happened to him?"

"He's dead."

Carol hadn't seen it for sure, but she knew. Glenn was dead, because that's how Negan wanted it. One of them had to die, and even if it wasn't by his hand, Negan had done it. Not Lucille, not some stupid piece of sports equipment. _Negan._

Lucille swallowed her tears. She finished eating, both of them quiet. When they were finished, she stood, clearing the plates. She said everything like it was the most normal thing in the world:

"I was too emotional. He'd never say it, but he's pissed at me. I'll tell him who Daryl is, he'll get it, but I don't want him to think any less of me, you know? I didn't really want to kill him. It just happened. I couldn't help myself. I guess I was pissed, too. He broke his promise." Carol watched in a state of shock as Lucille washed their plates with a sponge that looked brand new. "I guess he already ate. He's got his own fridge, but I know he barely keeps anything in there. He usually eats with us, but I reckon he's gotten used to doing it alone since I've been gone and the girls are- well, you know what happened to the girls."

Carol had to remind herself to breath. Lucille's green dress flowed with her gracefully, making her seem almost ethereal. She continued:

"He'll come down soon. He wants to talk to you, like I said. You're safe, like I promised, but I know he's got an offer for you. I hope you take it. It'll be nice to have someone else around. I'm not very good at doing little wife things- Dwight never expected it, and we were only living together for the months leading up to the wedding. Obviously we never got to that part."

Lucille almost giggled. Everything seemed eerily normal.

"You think you'll agree to stay? You thought about it yet?"

Carol thought about Glenn and Maggie, and the life that they would never have together. The baby they would never have _together. _

"He could make you happy here, you know. Safe. Comfortable."

She thought about Ed, and the false sense of security she'd survived with him.

"We could be sisters. Imagine, all of this bringing you and me together. Maybe that was the point of him all along. My father, I mean."

Carol thought about _Him, _and how devastated he must have been at that moment. If he'd survived. He'd looked close to death the night before, blood staining half of his clothes. She liked to think he was alive. She hoped that he wasn't looking for her.

Lucille leaned against the counter, crossing her arms in front of her chest and gazing dreamily at a candle Carol couldn't remember her lighting.

"Negan's always said that we were supposed to be a family, but as soon as I got the opportunity to go looking for you, I booted it. I wasn't even going to come back, except now everything's happened. He'll give me another chance, I've got to believe that. After all: I'm here, ain't I?"

"Yes," Carol answered, terrified. "We both are."

That made Lucille smile. She looked at Carol. "You think he'll have supper with us tonight?"

The younger woman's eyes were so blue, and overflowing with sincerity. Carol had done everything she could not to believe that this girl was Daryl Dixon's daughter, but everything in her eyes indicated that she must be.

9. Chapter 9

Daryl woke up cold.

It took a while to open his eyes. He wasn't sure if he was awake all at once, or if he'd dozed off a few times in his attempt to see where he was laying. Eventually, he managed to pry one eye open, and the light blinded him so effortlessly that he didn't bother trying again. He heard a low, gravelly voice next to him:

"I saw that."

Morgan.

"What are you doing here?" Daryl thought he demanded, but it came out as a dull groan.

He heard Morgan's chair scraping the floor as he came closer. Daryl groaned again. It wasn't that he hated the guy â€“ he'd saved his life, after all â€“ but of all the people to wake up next to, it had to be the one who tried to contradict Rick at every turn.

"Don't try to talk," Morgan told him, but Daryl wasn't going to listen to him.

His left hand managed to reach his face and rub his eyes enough to force them open. The light was still painful, but he had to know what was going on. Morgan was looking down at him with a face so gentle that Daryl wanted to punch him. Didn't he know what had gone down? Why hadn't he been there? That nightâ€|

"What day is it?" Daryl asked, and it came out clear enough for Morgan to understand him.

"Sunday," he answered. "You should keep resting," he added, still looking far too invested for Daryl to handle.

He couldn't count the days in his head, but he knew it had to have been a while since Negan's attack. He remembered everything: Dwight, the line-up, Glennâ€¡

_ "Lucille." _

It came out as an afterthought, something he thought he'd dreamed in the many nights since the attack. Lucille had been there, in Alexandria. She'd tried to stop it, but she'd hit Glenn.

She wasn't alone.

"Where's Carol?" Daryl asked roughly, trying to sit up. Morgan placed a hand on his chest, and the mere weight of it was enough to keep him down.

"I saw her, the day before it all happened. I was supposed to come back, but I wanted to borrow something from the school. That'sâ€¡ it's another settlement. The people there call it the Kingdom. It's a good place, not too far-

"I've heard of it." Dwight had mentioned it, bragging about a horse he'd stolen from there to his Savior friends. "Carolâ€¡ came back. What happened to her?"

Morgan frowned, and Daryl tried sitting up again. "You went into sepsis. You've been unconscious since that night, but you look stable now. I should go tell Rick you're awake." Morgan made to stand up, but Daryl reached his left arm out, clutching at a piece of his jacket. He settled back down, and continued speaking: "Glenn is alive, but it's bad. He's far worse off than you are. He's been asleep as well, but I don't think he's coming back. I'm sorry. I heard that he went after you. He didn't deserve-

_ "Where the fuck is Carol?!" _Daryl finally managed to hiss, and Morgan shook his head.

"I don't know. _We _don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"Eugene saw the Saviors carrying her away."

"Was she alive?"

"She wasn't walking. It's hard to say."

Daryl rubbed his face again. "They would have left her." _If she was dead, they would have dropped her. _ "I have to find her."

"_You _have to rest."

The horrible thing was, Morgan was right. Daryl was too weak to even leave whatever bed he'd been left in. He didn't recognize the room, but it was definitely in one of the houses. He turned his head to one side, finding a small bedside table. There was a journal on it that

he recognized as Carol's.

"I'm in her house."

"I thought you lived here, too?"

"I slept downstairs."

He'd been staying on the couch since they'd come to Alexandria. Carol never questioned the fact that he didn't want one of the bedrooms, and he'd started to assume it was because she didn't care, or maybe just because she hadn't noticed. That night, though, he'd realized that she must. She came back to save him.

"She left before the attack," Morgan was suddenly telling him, and Daryl squinted out of confusion rather than the bright light coming in through the window. "She left a note to explain. She doesn't want to take life anymore. She thought she'd have to if she stayed." Morgan's eyes bore into him too intensely. "She was trying to protect you."

_ "She did,"_ Daryl mumbled, because everything was becoming more and more clear.

Carol hadn't questioned his lack of bed because she didn't care, but because she knew it would make him uncomfortable. She knew that Daryl hadn't had a bedroom since he was a child, and even then he shared it with Merle. She knew how out of place he felt in Alexandria, and that sleeping on the couch kept him connected with the outside. Kept him alert.

Of course, that was only part of it. Mostly he slept there so that he could stop anyone coming into the house at night.

He slept there to protect _Her._

He looked at Morgan again, and he knew that the man could see straight through him.

The idiot even smiled.

Daryl wasn't in the mood.

"There was a girl there â€“ a woman," he corrected himself, remembering that Lucille would be well into her twenties. "She was with him, Negan. Anybody see what happened to her?"

"Gone with the rest of them. Rick said she was a Savior."

"She ain't with them," Daryl told him through gritted teeth. _She can't be._

"I wasn't there. I don't know."

"Then what good are you?"

Daryl tried rolling away from Morgan, but he landed on his injured shoulder, and found himself gasping out in pain. Morgan settled him back into a safe position, tucking the sheets around him so he wouldn't move again.

"Get your _damn _hands off of me!"

Morgan practically smirked. "I'm gonna go get Rick. He knows more than I do."

Daryl shut his eyes tight and grimaced, his shoulder still searing from the pain. "Wait," he ordered Morgan, who was already halfway out the door.

"Yes?"

"What did you borrow from The Kingdom?"

"They lent me a horse."

Daryl started coughing, and Morgan ran out of the room to find help.

"Get Rosita," Daryl pleaded through his hacking, hoping that the other man had heard him.

He had a plan.

10. Chapter 10

Two nights had passed since Carol's first day in The Compound.

Her head had started feeling better after the first night, and after the second she actually found herself in quite good health. She was okay, physically. Mentally!

Lucille was the one going stir-crazy in the small apartment that the two were sharing. They had everything that they needed: food, a shower, and even books. Lucille's daily activities involved waking, cooking, reading, and washing up every night before bed. It was repetitive, and Carol could see that the lack of Negan's presence was getting to her.

"He should have come down by now," Lucille told Carol wistfully. "I thought he might forgive me. Maybe he won't."

Carol didn't have a response. The younger woman was clearly devastated that the devil wasn't interested in her anymore. What could she say to make it better?

On the third night before bed, Lucille took a shower, and Carol dragged a chair from the kitchen into the bedroom. She climbed up on it, and managed to look out of the small window that hung over the room. There were a few lights on outside the building, and she could see the treeline. There was a Walker stumbling in and out of the forest. She gauged the size of the window — Lucille might be able to fit through it, but there was no way that she could.

Carol had grown fond of Lucille in those couple of days. The girl was brainwashed, clearly, but she was truly kind, and surprisingly bright. She didn't say much about her life before the Turn, but she did tell Carol a little bit about where she came from.

She was a debutant. Her stepfather â€“ one of many, Carol had determined â€“ ran a paper company. They were obscenely rich, but Lucille never fully acclimated to the lifestyle.

"I liked working," she told Carol. "It made me feel like I earned something."

Carol tried to find what she did for a living, but all Lucille told her was that she "worked for Dwight." It was how they met. How they fell in love.

"He wasn't such a bad guy, before all of this happened. He was real smart, too, and he liked all the same books that I did."

"When did he change?" Carol asked. She hated Dwight almost as much as Daryl did.

"Pretty much right when it started. He kept me safe for a while, and did a lot of bad things to make sure I was okay. Then he turned on me. In little ways, at first, then big ones. Then we met Negan. It was Dwight's idea to join up."

"And then you left him for Negan?"

Lucille shrugged. "Negan was a gentleman. He reminded me of my stepdad." She chuckled. "I guess that seems a little off-kilter."

Carol couldn't manage a fake laugh. She was too tired, and too terrified.

Every day in that place, while quiet, was another day in danger. The two women were locked up, and even if Lucille didn't want to admit it, she was a prisoner. Maybe she didn't even realize it, but Carol did, and she spent every moment outside of Lucille's watch planning her escape.

The trick would be getting Lucille to leave with her. Then again, if she didn't want to go, Carol wouldn't force her. She didn't need some brainwashed kid holding her back.

The only problem was that the brainwashed kid was Daryl's. Carol had a responsibility to him.

Lucille didn't mention him much. Only in passing, if she was telling a story about her childhood, or wondering aloud whether or not he and Dwight had gotten into another _ "scuffle." _

Carol heard the shower being turned off, and a few moments later Lucille appeared wrapped in towels. "What are you doing up there?" she asked Carol, who was still standing on the chair from the kitchen.

"Just looking outside."

"Not much to see."

Carol sighed and descended back down to the floor, dragging the chair back into the kitchen. When she returned to the room, Lucille was already tucked into the bed, her towels hung loosely from the bunk

above her.

They weren't escaping tonight.

Carol changed into some old fashioned pajamas that Lucille had lent her, crawling into her own bed cautiously. She didn't like sleeping in The Compound. Every morning the fridge seemed to be restocked, but Carol never heard anyone coming in to restock it.

She planned to stay awake that night, and to listen for when they entered. When she felt up to it, she thought she might attack the culprit, and exit while the door was unlocked. But that was a plan for another night, when Lucille was ready to leave with her.

Hours passed, and Lucille snored. Carol, now in decent health, was able to stay awake for the entire night. It was in the earliest minutes of daylight that she heard the hallway door creaking open, and then shutting. The fridge opened. There was some clanking and rattling as whomever had entered adjusted its contents, and then the fridge door closed. Carol expected the visitor to leave back from where they had come, but instead she heard footsteps approaching the door to where they were both supposed to be sleeping.

It opened, and Carol didn't dare move. She was lucky to be laying on her side, where she could see Lucille's red hair clearly, and the door in her peripheral vision. She closed her eyes when the visitor entered the room, peeking every few moments through her eyelashes as carefully as she could to see who had come in.

She heard him before she saw him. He sighed loudly, sitting down calmly on Lucille's bed. Carol peeked, and she could see how he had to hunch in order to keep from hitting his head on the base of the top bunk. He rubbed his eyes, and then placed the same hand on Lucille's back, rubbing it gently. Lucille turned over to him.

"You came," she whispered, sounding equal parts excited and nervous.

Carol could hear Negan sigh again. She couldn't tell whether it was out of disappointment or relief.

Lucille whispered again: "I wasn't sure you'd ever come back. I thought maybe you hated me too much. Hell, you should hate me."

"I could never," Negan murmured back to her, and Carol could practically hear Lucille glowing.

"I'm so sorry. I wanted to tell you to explain absolutely everything to you. That man, the one you were gonna kill that man is my father."

"I understand," Negan told her, and Carol had no idea how that was possible. He sounded so reasonable.

"I don't know why I turned on you!" Lucille was whimpering suddenly, and she didn't sit up when she began sobbing. Negan kept rubbing her back. "I'm so sorry your hands!" she remembered. She tried to sit up, but Negan pressed her back down softly.

He took one of her hands in his. "They're fine, see." It was too

dark, and Carol knew she couldn't properly see them, but she stared at his hands anyway. She kissed them.

"I don't know what got into me."

"Like you said, he was your father. I shouldn't have pushed you."

Carol nearly gasped.

Negan continued: "But you still disobeyed me." He didn't seem very angry, and Lucille didn't seem very scared:

"I know."

"You know what I have to do, don't you, my sweetheart?"

"Yes. It has to be fair. I get it."

"Good girl."

Carol shut her eyes tight as Negan started to adjust his position on the bed, and she could only hear what happened next. The drawing of a knife. The sawing of something hard. Lucille's low, peaceful sobs. The sound of something sticky being unraveled. A chaste kiss.

Negan left without a single word after that, and Carol spent the rest of sunrise watching Lucille curled up in the bed next to her, still crying over whatever had happened.

It wasn't until Lucille got out of bed that Carol did so as well. They both sat up, and Lucille looked absolutely overwhelmed with what Carol could only read as joy.

"He'll come see us today," Lucille told her exuberantly. "I just know he will."

Then Lucille's left foot came out from under the covers, and she groaned when she tried to step on it. There was a bandage, and a lot of blood. She giggled at her own misfortune.

Negan had removed one of her toes.

11. Chapter 11

"As if you have _ever _been on a horse," Rosita mocked, crossing her arms.

She and Daryl were behind the church, where Morgan's borrowed horse was tied up to a tree. Daryl shrugged.

"Can't be all that different."

"From a motorcycle? These things are alive, Daryl."

"So?"

"_So, _it's got a mind of it's own, _chiquito._ You do what she wants, not the other way around."

"Just teach me how to do it."

The Saviors had taken all of the cars. It was a shock, even to Rick, until one had come up to the gate with a message from Negan telling them they'd get a few back when they got their first mission. Negan didn't want anyone running away before he had a chance to use them.

Not that Rick had plans to run. Not with Glenn in the state he was in.

He still hadn't woken up. It had been three days since the attack, and Glenn was out. Daryl had almost thrown up when he saw his friend's head wrapped up like a mummy, one eye covered. It was Sasha who'd been able to step up, and she tended to him as much as she could, despite the fact that she had her own worries.

Abraham had tried to attack a Savior when he started looting the infirmary. He was stabbed, and while he was going to be fine, it was difficult for Sasha to balance her time between the two patients.

Well, three patients. Daryl wasn't supposed to be up. His right shoulder was still a mess from his run-in with Dwight, and just standing up was enough to get the blood rushing into his head. Still, he had people to find.

Rosita had agreed to helping without much of an argument. Before joining the military, her family owned horses. A lot of horses - she was an award-winning jockey. It was something Daryl had remembered her telling Aaron, while the other man was musing about how nice it would have been if they had managed to save Buttons.

The plan was to let Daryl out while she was manning the gate that evening. He'd ride out to where they'd attacked the Saviors, and see if that was where they were keeping Carol. And Lucille. If they weren't there, he'd promised Rosita he'd come back until they could come up with a better idea. He wasn't confident that he'd meant it.

Now she was petting Morgan's horse. She'd already named her.

Reina.

_ "My queen,"_ she murmured as she stroked the horse's soft black mane after saddling her. Everything Rosita did was slow and graceful, as though she feared startling the creature. Daryl worried that he might not have the same level of finesse.

"Just tell me how to get her to and stop. I can work the rest out later."

"Slow down, Daryl," Rosita cooed, still talking more to Reina than to him. "First she has to let you mount her."

"Excuse me?"

Rosita rolled her eyes. "You can't ride a horse if she won't let you on."

"Can't I just climb up there?"

She had a sly grin. "Go ahead and try."

Daryl scoffed, approaching the horse with the same assuredness he had on his bike. Just as he was about to grip the saddle, Reina nudged him away. He was still weak, and he fell backwards.

Rosita laughed as she helped him up. "See what I mean?" Daryl rubbed his shoulder. Rosita frowned. "Look, you're not ready for this. We can try again in a few days. If Negan wants something with Carol, he's not just going to—"

"I got this," Daryl interrupted her, approaching the horse again. This time Reina didn't push him away, but she did cower.

Rosita calmed her down. "Daryl!" she warned quietly, for the sake of the horse. "Just go back to bed."

"I've gotta go get 'em back!" he hissed, startling Reina. Rosita raised an eyebrow.

He froze. He'd said too much.

"Get who?"

"Carol."

"Carol _and_?" Daryl licked his lips. Rosita sighed. "You have to tell me, Daryl, or I can't help you."

It was a big decision. Telling Rosita about Lucille would make it real, and it might hold her back from supporting him. Worse, it might make her stop trusting him.

Daryl's friendship with Rosita had come out of nowhere. Somewhere in between losing Carol, and spending more time with Denise and Tara, he'd discovered that he and Rosita were on the same wavelength. She was a survivor, built for the world they lived in. She wasn't like Abraham: he was rough, crude, and too proud to have survived.

Rosita wasn't proud, she was just alive. She cared more about the survival of others than herself, and yet she knew that she had to live in order to protect them. It was a pragmatic approach to the world that reminded Daryl of how Carol used to be, and it inspired him to keep moving forward.

And frankly, they just got along. Denise had worn Daryl down, forcing him to spend time with the three women. They didn't ask him to be anything that he wasn't, but they liked his company. He liked theirs, too. He dreaded the thought of being there when Tara returned from her run with Heath. It was part of the reason he wanted to leave sooner rather than later. With Denise dead, he would lose the bond the four of them had managed to forge together.

Daryl held his shoulder, more to make himself small than to support it. He mumbled the truth: "I'm getting the redhead, too."

Rosita squinted at him. "There is no way I heard that right."

Daryl let himself get a little louder. "She's someone I know, from beforeâ€|everything. I think that's why she tried to save me."

"She kidnapped Carol!"

"I don't think that's true. Carol wouldn't have come back. She would have found a way out of it."

Rosita groaned. "Are you kidding me? You've seen what those people can do!"

"And you've seen what She can do. Carol chose to follow Lucy, I know she did. They had a plan."

"Lucy?" Rosita folded her arms again. Daryl licked his lips again. It was a stand-off, and he won. "Whatever they were planning, they failed, and now Glenn's gonna die. You want to bring her here while Maggie is dealing with that?"

He didn't have an argument. He'd only seen Maggie once since waking up the previous morning, and she looked like she'd been hit by a train. She was covered in a cold sweat, and her eyes were red colour that rivaled a Walker. She'd cut her hair off haphazardly, and when Enid had offered to help fix it, she'd snapped at her in a way that made Daryl jump. No, Maggie wasn't herself, and when the father of her child inevitably died, she would be inconsolable.

And furious. She would be furious.

Again, Daryl was at a loss, so he breathed, and he very slowly tried to approach Reina.

The animal didn't budge.

He placed a firm hand on her saddle, and she nickered. His head rushed as he lifted his foot into the stirrup, but she remained calm, and he managed to lift himself over her back.

As soon as he was straddling the horse, his vision wavered, and everything around him seemed too bright. Reina snickered as he let himself fall forward and rest his head in her mane. It took several deep breaths before he could hear Rosita again.

"Daryl, are you okay?" she was demanding, holding him as steady as she could from the ground. She could barely reach his torso.

"Yeah, I'm here," he exhaled, sitting up. "Just a little light-headed."

"No shit." She took a step back. She looked decidedly uncomfortable, but after a moment she moaned and placed her hands on her hips.

"Look," she scolded, "I don't know who this perra is to you, but if you say she's good people, I trust you. Do you have to go tonight?"

Daryl was still shivering. He wasn't cold. Reina buzzed.

"I'll go rest, leave in the morning. It'll take a while to get out there, anyway. Can you switch your shift?"

"Spencer has watch in the morning. I can convince him to trade," Rosita agreed smugly.

She helped him down, letting him lean on her through another head rush when his feet hit the ground. She sniggered. "You used to be so tough."

"Could still take you on."

"Yeah, you keep telling yourself that, _nene._"

One day, Daryl swore to himself, he would learn enough Spanish to get back at her.

12. Chapter 12

Negan didn't show up.

By dinnertime that evening, Carol found herself almost grateful for the calm day she'd spent tending to Lucille's injured foot. The younger woman was energetic throughout breakfast, but the pain hit her halfway through lunch time, and by dinner she was sitting helplessly in the kitchen, letting Carol cook whatever meat Negan had left in the refrigerator the night before.

She didn't speak. She barely ate. She just waited.

Carol put down a plate in front of her. Lucille stared at it, and Carol tried to talk to her:

"I want to take you to a place that I found. It's called the Kingdom. It's a school building."

Lucille looked up. "I know what it is."

"Oh," Carol whispered. That meant Negan knew it, too.
"Thenâ€|somewhere else. I can take you back to Alexandria, but I can't stay with you. You can hide there."

"Hide from what?" Lucille was nowhere near as cheerful as she'd been for the previous three days. Carol saw it as an opportunity.

"You need to get out of here, and away from him. _We _need to get away from him." Lucille looked confused, so Carol continued: "You're small enough to it through the window. There's not guard on that side of the building, and you'll be able to make it into the woods safely. He comes every morning around six to fill the fridge. I can wait by the door and knock him out, or better, and then I can sneak out and join you there. We can get away."

"We're safe here."

"No," Carol insisted, "We are not."

Lucille had the saddest smile that Carol had ever seen, as though she pitied her. "Look, I understand how hard this must be for you. He was supposed to come and see you ages ago, and it's been days. But look on the bright side: you're fed, you have a proper bathroom, and you're sleeping in a bed while you-"

"-_You're _missing a toe."

Lucille frowned. "It's standard punishment. Really, it's nothing compared to what most people get. 'Chelle lost a finger, and this ain't even one of the important toes, just an extra one in the middle. I'm all right."

"What he is doing is not okay."

"I know you must think I'm crazy."

Lucille admitted it, and Carol didn't have a response. They sat together in silence for a minute before the redhead spoke again:

"I know all about what he is, and I know he's ruthless. He's not perfect, and I never claimed that he is, but it's safe here. I'm safe here, and I trust him."

"You shouldn't."

"Do you trust your leader?"

Carol's head twitched. "I don't have a leader."

"Sure you do. That man, Rick, isn't he in charge of your community?"

"You know I don't live there anymore."

"Okayâ€|" Lucille trailed off, then she looked as though she had an idea. "Do you trust my father?"

Carol said, "Yes," before she could even consider the question. Of course she did. She always had.

Lucille made the same small smile again. "If things had been different, and he'd been in charge, and he wanted revenge for a whole lot of loss against your communityâ€|would you follow him?"

"He's never killed anyone in cold blood."

"You're saying that we have?"

"I'm saying that Negan has! The people at the Hilltop told us he killed a child!"

Lucille licked her lips before pursing them. She looked a little surprised, as though she hadn't known about that before. She shook her head. "You can't know if that's true."

"It is true!"

"Your people killed our people. You killed my friends-"

"-I'm sorry about that-"

"-You killed 'Chelle, but I forgive you, and all I ask is that you give Negan a chance!"

They were both yelling now, and Carol felt almost relieved to hear some proper emotion coming out of Lucille, even if it was anger. At least it was justified. Carol still felt an immeasurable guilt for killing Negan's other wives, but she hadn't considered how kind Lucille had been to her considering they'd been her friends. They'd been her sisters, and yet Lucille still tried to help her.

Daryl Dixon's daughter, indeed.

Carol breathed. "I won't attack whoever comes in tonight," she compromised, "If you'll go out the window. Or we can break down the door and make a run for it. Just please give Alexandria a chance—"

"Oh my God!" Lucille drawled, as frustrated as Carol had ever seen her. She rubbed the tears from her eyes as she managed to stand up and walk over to the exit. Still in immense pain, she snapped at Carol: "The door ain't even locked!"

With that, she turned the doorknob and shoved it open viciously.

Carol gasped, but not because the door had been open the entire time she'd been there.

She gasped because Negan was on the other side of it.

"Fancy meeting you here," he flirted, and Carol could have fainted.

13. Chapter 13

Daryl didn't sleep well.

He kept rolling onto his shoulder, and waking up in pain. He felt warmer than usual, and yet his body felt cold. Clammy. By the time he was supposed to be at the gate, he could barely get out of bed, but then he remembered who he was leaving for, and he forced himself out the door.

Rick was patrolling the streets as Daryl tried to make it to the church. He approached.

"You look better than I thought you would," he joked, placing a supportive hand on Daryl's unharmed shoulder. He would never say it, but Rick was unbelievably relieved at how quickly Daryl had healed after the night of the attack.

Daryl scoffed. "Don't feel much better."

"You can go back to bed. I'll come get you if any of them show up."

_Them. _The Saviors.

"Nah," Daryl shook his head. "I'd rather be around. Ready for 'em."

He hated lying to Rick, but he knew that the Sheriff would never let

him leave. Even if it was to save Carol. He'd brought it up, after Daryl had woken a couple days earlier. They couldn't attack the Savior's base again so soon after everything that had happened. "We just have to trust that she can keep herself alive," Rick had told him. "She always has before."

Rick was different since the attack. Alert, even a little jittery. He spent any time that he wasn't patrolling checking on the patients, making sure that they were still all right. Abraham was perfectly fine, and was already back to building up the wall with Tobin. Daryl was as good as he was going to be, and Glennâ€

Daryl had passed by the infirmary before he met Rick. Somehow, Glenn was still alive, breathing shallowly on a stretcher. Maggie was sound asleep next to him, one hand resting on her barely swollen middle. She hadn't left his side since it happened. Sasha fed her as much as she would eat. It wasn't enough, and her face already looked thinner than it should.

Daryl nodded at Glenn's sleeping body before heading back out onto the street. After all, he might be gone by the time he returned.

"Look, I gotta go make sure Carl's awake," Rick said, breaking Daryl's trance. "Gabriel's offered to do some tutoring, and I want to make sure he goes. We still have to live, even if they're coming."

"I'm with you," Daryl agreed. Rick nodded, his eyes darting in every direction as though he expected Negan to be waiting for him. "We're gonna be okay," Daryl assured him as he walked away. Rick didn't seem to acknowledge it.

Daryl swallowed the pain in his shoulder and kept moving towards the church. He was lucky to get there before Gabriel, and managed to unhinge Reina's binds before Morgan showed up as well. He saddled her the way Rosita had taught him to, sneaking a water bottle onto her belt, and walked her to the gate confidently. Eugene passed him at one point, nodding as though Daryl with a horse was a totally normal sight. _Dumbass._

When he got to the gate, Rosita was waiting for him. There was no one in the watch tower.

"Went to the bathroom," she explained. "You've got good timing."

"Let's hope so."

"You sure you're ready to do this?" Rosita asked tenderly, brushing his injured shoulder. Daryl winced, but nodded his head. She rolled her eyes. "Okay. You get on her, and flick the reins to get her moving. If you need to go fast, kick on both sides and whack her ass if it's still not enough."

"Just like in the movies."

Another eye roll. "Sure. You remember what I told you about turning?"

She'd given him another briefing before bed the previous night.

"Think so."

"I still think this is a dumb idea."

"Won't be saying that when I bring our friends home."

Rosita frowned. "Friend. I only give a crap about Carol." Rosita couldn't have looked less impressed, but she still reached around her back and retrieved a pistol from her jeans. She handed it to Daryl. "Take this, okay?"

Daryl did. "Tell Rick whatever you have to. He'll be happy to see her, too."

"I hope you make it back."

Daryl smirked. "Me too." Rosita opened the gate, and he managed to mount Reina without a hitch. The horse nickered. "I'll see you," Daryl swore as he rode away, and then swore in many different ways when Reina decided to move faster than he'd anticipated.

By evening, Daryl felt pretty good about his ride with Reina. He gotten used to leading her, and making her go in whichever direction he'd wanted her to. The only thing he regretted about the trip was not bringing any food, although he didn't feel much like eating. His appetite had gone for several days, and he only drank water when he convinced himself that he needed to.

He was sweating more than he than he thought he should. Maybe Rosita was right, _he thought, _I should have held off a couple days.

The sun was setting, and he didn't dwell on it. He was out of Alexandria, and had made it as close to the Savior's Compound as he could without being caught. In fact, he was surprised at how little defence they had surrounding their base. Dismounting Reina, he walked her close to the edge of the woods, where there was a good enough view between the trees to see the Compound. He could tell he was behind the building, opposite of where the group had come the first time they'd been there.

As he tied Reina to a branch, a Walker approached from behind them. Daryl snuffed it with ease, though the motion of stabbing it made his upper body tingle, and his shoulder started to hurt again. He moaned as quietly as he could, and he heard something rustling nearby. Reina flinched.

He raised his knife, ready for another Walker, but none appeared. He felt his heartbeat start to race, and he regretted the trip. Everything at that moment was a 'Worst-Case Scenario.' What if it was a Savior, or even Negan?

His breathing sped up as well, and he knew it was his body playing tricks on him, but he felt scared. He felt terrified. He dropped the knife, and he heard someone gasp. He grabbed the gun and held it out in front of him.

"Who's out there?" He wanted to yell, but it came out as a hoarse

whisper.

His stalker took a few steps towards him. He tried to listen for their direction.

Behind you.

He pivoted as quickly as he could, and Reina shuddered next to him. His fingers tightened around the gun.

"Come out!"

"Don't hurt me," A female voice responded quietly. _Not Carol._ He could hear fast breathing, and a little heaving. Whoever she was, she was crying.

Then he heard a gun cocking. He mounted Reina as quickly as he could. He held onto his gun with one hand and his knife in the other, ready to break the horse's binds in case he needed to run. He hoped that he didn't.

"Come out where I can see you!" His voice was a little louder. He placed his index finger on the trigger. "Now!"

She stepped out from behind a tree, her hands raised in surrender, one holding a pistol of her own. The sun had set, but the moonlight was enough to see her face. It was dripping with tears.

"Oh my Godâ€œ!" she whispered when she saw the horse, though she didn't seem to have noticed Daryl on it yet.

"Drop the gun!" he ordered, and she did.

"Is that you?" she asked, and Daryl squinted. She seemed calmer now, but she kept her hands up. Her hair looked wet, and a little dark, but it was just as red as Daryl remembered.

She took a step closer, and Reina whinnied. A light came on from the Compound.

Everything happened in a flash. "We have to go!" she hissed, and Daryl broke Reina's ties without a thought. The young woman had already climbed onto the horse when he kicked his legs, propelling them forward. Someone shot at them.

"Carol," Daryl shouted behind him as they galloped away. "Is Carol alive?"

"Yes," Lucille answered, barely loud enough for him to hear through all the commotion. She was holding his waist.

"Is she okay?" he begged. Lucille's grip tightened around him, and he felt her chin rest on his undamaged shoulder.

She started laughing.

14. Chapter 14

When they were far enough away from the Compound, Daryl managed to

slow Reina to a stop. He leaned forward, shoulders heaving. Lucille held him up as best she could.

"You all right?" she asked, glancing around them to make sure there weren't any Walkers nearby.

Daryl rubbed his eyes. "S'my arm. Still not healed."

"I can ride us back. I don't want you to overexert it."

Daryl managed to sit up. "You ride?"

"Since I was little, remember?"

He didn't.

"Okay."

She got off the horse, and back on in front of him so effortlessly that he stopped wondering how she'd survived in the world for so long. She was agile, but as soon as she was back on the horse, she groaned and clutched her left foot.

"You hurt?" Daryl asked.

Lucille nodded. "Lost a toe. Still getting used to it."

Daryl's eyes narrowed. She didn't seem to care about who he was, or where they were, or how he'd held his gun at her when he found her. Her hair was nearly dry, and he could see it forming into loose curls. She didn't look at him. He didn't know what to say.

"Why ain't she with you?"

"She decided to stay."

Daryl stared at her. His heart pounded. "Why'd you leave?"

Lucille laughed again, and now that he could see her face, he could tell that it wasn't because anything was funny. She snapped the reins, and Daryl gripped onto her jean jacket. They rode fast.

* * *

><p>"Fancy meeting you here."</p>

It was the previous night, and Negan was staring directly into Carol's eyes. Lucille placed herself in his line of vision.

"I didn't think you were coming."

Negan smiled at her. "I'm sorry. I wanted to be here, but we got a call about Hilltop. Needed some tending to." He sighed. "It's been a long day."

Lucille nodded. "You hungry? There's lots left, and the salad ain't too soggy."

"I ate before."

"Oh."

Lucille looked as helpless in front of Negan as Carol felt. She hadn't noticed that she was standing now, or that she was clutching her steak knife so tightly that her fingers were numb. Negan glanced at her.

"Now, that won't be at all necessary, I promise. I'm just here for a visit."

Carol glared. Negan grinned.

Lucille turned around. "What the hell is that for?" she asked Carol with an annoyed tone. Carol looked at the knife, noticing it for the first time. There were no words for how she felt. "Put that down!" Lucille demanded, and Carol dropped the knife on the table. The metal clanged loudly against hard wood.

"Let's all have a little chat," Negan suggested. He let himself into the kitchen and stood at the head of the table, across from where Carol was still standing. He nodded to Lucille, who limped over to the chair adjacent to his.

"Please," he requested politely, "Have a seat." Lucille sat. Carol didn't.

Negan didn't ask again. He pulled out his own chair and sat, sighing in relief.

"Let me get you something to drink," Lucille offered, but Negan held up his arm calmly.

"I'm fine, you don't need to do anything. You shouldn't even be standing with your foot."

No shit, Carol thought, and then flinched, hoping she hadn't said it out loud. Negan looked at her, and his lip twitched into a half-smile.

"You really can sit down, Carol. I just want to talk." She couldn't move. "Please." Still nothing.

"Just sit down, Carol!" Lucille suddenly hissed, but Negan placed a hand on her arm. Still gentle.

"It's okay. If she's not comfortable, we shouldn't force her."

"You're right. I'm sorry." She placed her opposite hand where Negan's rested on her shoulder.

Then Carol stirred. She sat back down, pulling in her chair. Negan beamed.

"Thank you," he said softly. Carol glared.

They were all silent for a minute, until Negan spoke again.

"I gather you thought you were a prisoner here?"

Carol didn't speak, but she nodded.

Lucille huffed. "I told you that you're safe."

"It's okay, Lucille," Negan assured her. She gazed at him.

Carol gagged.

"Now," Negan continued, "I want you to know that whatever you choose, nobody is going to hurt you. Hell, you could walk out that door and into the field and not a single one of my men will stop you unless you give them a good reason to. You hear me?"

Carol nodded again. She moved as though to stand up. Then-

"But I hope you don't."

She froze. She sat back down. _Stupid._

Negan was still grinning slightly. "The fact is, and I think you've gathered this by now: I like you. I know who you are, and I know who Maggie is, and I know what the two of you did. Furthermore, I know what you did to my men on the road, and yetâ€¢ Christ, there's something about _you_, isn't there?"

Carol bit her lip. She stared at Negan's hand holding Lucille's. The younger woman watched him like a God. She thought of Daryl, and she nearly gagged again.

"You know what I want to ask you," Negan told her.

Carol shook her head. "No," she finally responded. "I really don't."

Negan's smirk was fully realized now. He even chuckled. "You should come up to my room sometime. I don't mean for that," he added, noting Carol's disgust. "Unless, of course, you'd be interested in something like that right off the bat."

Lucille had a look of pride that made Carol want to vomit.

Negan kept talking: "I have a few things I'd like to show you. Maybe they'll clear things up. All right?"

Carol did nothing. She didn't respond. Negan looked at his watch. He stood.

Lucille stood with him.

"Will you come back in the morning?" she asked, the hopefulness in her voice unbearable.

Negan drew her in for a long, uncomfortable kiss. Carol couldn't help staring.

"I'm going to have a shower," Lucille told her husband, and waddled away from him as gracefully as she could, side-eying Carol as she passed into their bedroom. Negan watched her go.

"She's young enough to be your daughter."

The words escaped Carol's mouth before she could silence them. Negan turned to her.

"She's old enough to make her own decisions." He didn't sound angry, but Carol was too shaken to say anything else. Negan gave her a small nod. "I hope you'll at least stay the night. Come see me upstairs, it's easy to find. Like I said, it'll all up to you."

He was gone before Carol could so much as breathe again, the door closing behind him so quietly she wondered if he'd closed it at all. But he had closed it.

She heard the shower going on as she stared at the handle. A few minutes passed before she stood and placed her hand around. She turned her wrist.

The door opened. Still unlocked. —

She tried to take a step, but she couldn't. Negan had promised she could leave, and that she'd be safe if she did, but something told her not to believe him.

She shut the door. She backed away, and then turned. She went into the bedroom.

She laid down in the bed that had been chosen for her. The sun had set. It was later than she'd thought.

She heard Lucille's voice from the bathroom. She was singing.

Carol cried herself to sleep.

That night, she dreamt of Ed.

It wasn't a nightmare. It was a sunny day, and they were sitting in the garden. Sophia was there, and she looked beautiful. She was playing with a blade of grass. Carol was watching her.

Ed was watching Carol. He was smiling, and telling her how much he'd appreciated her not telling Sophia about what had happened the day before, when he'd slapped her so hard her skin had broken, and she bled. In the dream, Carol couldn't remember exactly what he said had happened, but she also forgot to care. Ed was happy, Sophia was happy, and in many ways, she was happy too.

She jerked awake, sitting up so quickly that her head started to spin. She immediately looked at Lucille's bed, only to find it empty. The sun outside seemed to be halfway through rising.

She went into the kitchen. She opened the fridge.

It was full.

She looked at the door.

She thought of Daryl, and asked herself what he would do. Lucille was missing, and Negan had taken her, and she was broken enough to let him.

She ran into the hallway. It was empty, and looked long in both directions. She turned left, and found a door that opened into a stairway. Someone was coming down the stairs. A Savior.

She recognized the man as Mick. He didn't seem surprised to find her there. He nodded to her as he passed, carrying on down the staircase into a basement Carol didn't dare wonder about. She looked up. She climbed the stairs, and when she got to the top floor, she exited the stairwell into another hallway.

This hallway only had two doors. One was clearly an entrance to the rooftop. The otherâ€¦

She didn't knock. Lucille was in there, and she needed help. Carol realized as soon as she opened the unlocked door that she hadn't brought any weapons.

As it happened, she didn't need any.

Negan's apartment was significantly nicer than the one she and Lucille were staying in. The walls were painted, there were lights and lamps on everywhere, and the furniture looked as good as new. The hallway door opened into a little sitting room, and she tiptoed in, her heart racing.

She turned a corner into what looked like a kitchen, except that none of the appliances looked used. There was an oversized kitchen table, and Negan was already there. He was writing something. He didn't look up.

"I didn't think you'd get here so quickly," he told Carol, keeping his voice low.

She glared. "Where is she?"

He looked up. "Lucille?" Carol nodded, her eyes darting around the room for anything that could be used as a weapon. Negan chuckled. "She's still asleep. It's barely morning, you know."

"She's okay?"

Negan looked confused. "Why wouldn't she be?" Carol breathed deeply as Negan stood. He motioned for her to follow him as he moved towards a half-closed door next to the oven. He opened it, letting some light from the kitchen into the room. Lucille was asleep in his enormous bed.

Above her, Negan's baseball bat was displaced like a trophy. Carol shivered.

Negan closed the door. "I realize you don't approve, but I assure you, she came to see me."

He returned to the table. Carol realized how close they were to each other. She walked to the other side of the kitchen, and sat opposite him. There were at least five feet between them.

"You made a good point last night," Negan told Carol.

She scoffed. "How so?"

"I tend to prefer women my own age. When I met Lucille, she pursued me. I'll never know why."

Carol knew. He had power, and he used it. He fooled her into thinking that meant she was safe.

Negan continued, "Paula â€“ you met her, remember? â€“ she was way more my type. Even Molly. There were other women, of course, before. They didn't make it."

"And the other girlâ€¦Michelle?"

Negan shrugged. "I can't help the women who fall for me." Carol felt sick again. "And anyway, it benefits the community for me to be around younger women. More likely to repopulate that way."

"You're looking for wombs, not women."

"Hardly," Negan disagreed. He looked shocked that she would even accuse him of such a thing. "Like I said, it's a perk. Obviously if you were interested in having children–"

"I'm fifty-years old!"

Negan shrugged, nonplussed. "A man shouldn't assume."

Carol stared at him for a few seconds, and then looked at the table. "What is that?" she asked, motioning to the book he was writing in.

He held it up. "This is what I wanted to show you. It's a list of jobs for your community members, and things I want them to find for me. Assuming, of course, that Alexandria is still your community."

"Why wouldn't it be?"

Negan raised an eyebrow. "Lucille told me you tried to abandon them. I can see why â€“ the town is poorly defended."

"They've come this far."

"And now they work for me."

Carol suddenly realized that she wasn't shaking anymore. She was terrified, but her body was calm. Something about Negan's demeanor made her feel like she didn't have to fight. He didn't want to, after all.

He pushed the book across the table. "Have a look."

Carol took it. It was a list of names, each one a surviving member of Alexandria.

Rick â€“ Gather ammunition

Carl â€“ Ammunition

Maggie â€“ Medicine

Abraham " Retrieve livestock

Daryl " Retrieve livestock

Carol-

Carol froze at her task. _Wife._

"This is your way of proposing?"

Negan tittered. "If you'll have me."

Carol didn't appease him. "How do you know all their names?"

"We've been watching. And anyway, it was easy to steal a few documents while we were there Friday night. I suppose you missed that part."

"I wasn't exactly conscious."

"I know. That was wrong. The right people were punished."

"Was Glenn the right person?"

Negan frowned. "What happened was more than fair trade-off, and for the record, I have it on relatively good authority that your friend is still alive."

Carol gasped. "He survived?"

Negan nodded. "Lucille's a strong girl, but she wasn't exactly aiming for _him,_ you'll recall."

At that moment, Lucille came into the kitchen. She was in her green dress, and her foot was swollen. Negan went to her, placing a supportive arm around her waist. "Let me carry you back down," he offered.

"I'm fine," she told him. She glared at Carol. "What's she still doing here?"

"Now, now, sweetheart. You remember what I told you? Carol has every right to be a little on-edge."

Lucille nodded at Negan. They kissed. Carol felt as though she might as well have left the room.

"I'll go down and make some breakfast," Lucille offered, and Negan smiled. She left the apartment, still limping, without so much as a nod to Carol.

Negan sat back down. "She doesn't hold a grudge," he told Carol. "But she doesn't like being made to feel like a child. Strikes me you've made her feel that way."

"I never meant to."

"It's okay. She'll come around."

"She's in love with you," Carol told Negan suddenly.

"I know."

"Can you feel the same way, with so many women attached to you?"

Negan's smile was so pure that Carol almost trusted him. "I hope you'll find that I am equally devoted to each and every one of my wives."

Negan sent Carol back to her room before him, claiming that he still had a few names on the list to assign tasks to. When she returned, Lucille ran to her as though she'd assumed the older woman was Negan himself.

"I thought you'd leave."

Carol closed the door. She smelled eggs. Lucille was making another omelette.

"I'm not leaving you alone." Lucille scoffed, and kept cooking. She was focused. "Daryl wouldn't want me to."

Lucille stopped. She took the frying pan off the heat. "He has nothing to do with this."

"He's your father."

"Not really. Not the way you want him to be."

"He's the reason I'm here," Carol finally admitted, and she meant it. She hadn't stayed in the Compound out of fear, or out of curiosity, or even out of Negan's request. She stayed because Daryl wouldn't have left without Lucille. Whatever their relationship was, he would be loyal to her. She might not be family, but she was blood, and to him that would always be worth saving.

"He's alive," Lucille reminded Carol. "We did what we needed to, and he survived."

"You weren't supposed to come back here," Carol retorted. "You were leaving, remember? You told me that."

"That was before."

Carol sighed. "Look, I don't want to, but I'll go back to Alexandria if I have to. If you need me to take you there, and to stay with you, I will."

"I don't want to go with you," Lucille told Carol. "You can go, if you want. You can go wherever you need to go, but I'm staying here."

"Please don't."

Lucille stared into Carol's eyes so deeply that, for a moment, it seemed like they finally understood one another. Then she said the saddest thing that Carol could have heard: "This is all I have now. No father, no family, no right to anything better. This is my only

home. And I don't think that I want you here anymore."

A second later Negan was knocking on the door, and he let himself in. Lucille sprang into action, setting the table and finishing their food. Negan sat, and she served him. He ate greedily.

Carol didn't sit. He looked at her. "I thought we were past this," he joked, but nothing about it was funny. Lucille took her own seat at the table, eating slowly. She looked cheerful. It made Carol want to cry.

She didn't cry. She spoke:

"Okay."

Negan stopped eating. "Sorry?"

Carol inhaled. "Okay," she repeated. "I accept your proposal."

Negan understood. He smiled. Lucille looked as though she'd been hit by a ton of bricks. She didn't speak. She didn't have anything to say.

Negan pushed his chair out a little, but Carol held out her hand. "No need to get up," she assured him. He put down his fork. "I'll clear your plate," Carol offered, and suddenly she felt as though she was back in Alexandria, playing her part. She washed his dish in the sink. She poured him a glass of water. She placed it down in front of him.

She managed to muster up a smile, and Negan looked as though he'd never been so enthralled.

And Lucille glared.

"We should celebrate," said Negan, his eyes never leaving Carol's face. She looked at Lucille.

The poor girl looked helpless again. Jealous. Devastated, like this was suddenly the worst-case scenario.

"Lucille," Negan asked, not looking at her, "Don't you think we should celebrate?"

"Yes," she whispered, and only Carol could tell that she didn't mean it.

"Carol," Negan summoned his new wife, "What do you propose?"

Carol looked at Lucille, and then back to Negan, and then back to Lucille.

She made a choice.

She got down on her knees.

And she didn't pray.

Lucille didn't say a word to her for the rest of the day.

Negan left. Lucille went into the bedroom, sitting quietly and tending to her foot. Carol ate, and then she showered for at least an hour. She'd never felt so unclean.

She wished that Lucille would get mad, or that she'd have disappeared by the time she came out from the bathroom, but the younger woman was still there. Still silent. Still hurting. She didn't look angry so much as she looked broken. She wouldn't look Carol in the eye. She didn't even read.

By the time lunch rolled around, Carol didn't know if she should make anything. Lucille didn't seem to be hungry, and she definitely wasn't. So Carol sat at the kitchen table, waiting for the silence to end.

Lucille passed through the room, still in her green dress. "I'm taking a walk," she muttered, not so much to Carol as to the apartment itself. Carol watched her leave quietly, hoping that she wouldn't return.

As the hours passed, Carol reconsidered her choice over and over again. She'd needed to make a point. She couldn't back to Alexandria, and yet Lucille wouldn't follow her anywhere else. Lucille wouldn't follow her at all. She had to push out, and the best way to do that was for Carol to stay.

Staying had other benefits. She would be close to Negan. Close to his plans for Rick, and Daryl, and the group. Glenn was still alive, and that mattered. That made a difference.

Of course, Negan would know she was still loyal to them. He was stupid in so many ways, but smart in the world. He must have known that she disapproved of his treatment of her old community, and if she was lucky, he might even consult as to what he should do next. She might gain a power of her own. It was too soon to tell, but at least it might give Alexandria a chance.

Carol was making dinner when Lucille returned. She looked tired. "I'm taking a shower," she said, still to no one in particular.

Negan didn't show up for dinner, and Carol assumed the worst. She left the apartment â€“ her apartment â€“ and looked for him upstairs. His door was open, as it had been before, but he wasn't anywhere to be found. She checked his bedroom.

The barbed-wire baseball bat was gone.

She returned to the lower floor. There was nothing she could do except wait to find out where Negan had gone, and why he'd taken his weapon with him. She walked through her kitchen and into her bedroomâ€¢

Lucille was gone.

Carol checked the bathroom. Nothing.

There wasn't a single clue to where the younger woman was except for the light green dress, which she'd left on her unmade bed.

Carol was alone, and that had been her choice.

* * *

><p>Daryl waited until Lucille was finished laughing to question her again. "Who was shooting at you?"</p>

"They were shooting at you," Lucille corrected him. She made a sound that seemed to be meant only for the horse, who took a sharp right.

"They know who I am?"

"You better hope not. Your community's on thin ice as it is."

Daryl's vision wavered. "You're taking us to Alexandria?" He didn't question how she could know the way. He could tell that she was following the tracks he'd made on the way to the Compound. She was retracing his steps.

"Don't worry, we'll be there in a few hours."

He was too exhausted to be proud of her. He didn't even know if he had the right.

"Tell me Carol's okay," he managed to groan at one point during their ride.

He barely heard his daughter respond, "She is. She'll be just fine."

End
file.